



## **Hoping Against Hope? The Struggle Against Colonialism in Canada**

### **Part One - Colonization and the Killing of History**

Welcome to Hoping Against Hope? The Struggle Against Colonialism in Canada, a three-part series produced by Praxis Media Productions and the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group.

This is the first installment, Colonization and the Killing of History  
Narrated by Ardath Whyngaught

**Narration:** Aboriginal communities throughout Canada are beset with record levels of suicide, high infant mortality rates, rampant sexual exploitation, epidemic levels of gas-sniffing, and alcohol, drug and solvent abuse. Furthermore there is an over-representation of indigenous people in the prison system, and chronic levels of desperate poverty.

Exploring why this is happening is the theme of this piece. Throughout, we'll be exploring the underbelly of our history to paint a picture of our humanity. We will challenge the myths that justify today's reality of colonialism in Canada.

We are frequently given explanations that somehow locate the source of these problems within Aboriginal individuals themselves. Notice that most explanations blame Indians: genetic predispositions to alcoholism or suicide, lack of education, or even one's personal lack of cultural identity. Others blame social or geographic isolation, cultural deprivation in the community, corrupt band councils or difficulties adjusting to a legacy of colonialism that may not have been pretty, but is now- somehow-behind us.

Dr. Roland Chrisjohn is Oneida from the Haudenaushaunee Confederacy and the Director of Native Studies at St. Thomas University in Fredericton. He disagrees with these explanations and summarizes the situation at the outset of his book "The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience in Canada."

**Roland Chrisjohn:** What if the Holocaust had never stopped?

What if no liberating armies invaded the territory stormed over by the draconian State? No compassionate throng broke down the doors to dungeons to free those imprisoned within? No collective outcry of humanity arose as stories of the State's abuses were recounted? And no Court of World Opinion seized the State's leaders and held them in judgment as their misdeeds were chronicled? What if none of this happened?

What if, instead, with the passage of time the World came to accept the State's actions as the rightful and lawful policies of a sovereign nation having to deal with creatures that were less than fully human?

What if the Holocaust had never stopped, so that, for the State's victims, there was no vindication, no validation, no justice, but instead the dawning realization that this was how things were going to be? What if those who resisted were crushed, so that others, tired of resisting, simply prayed that the 'next' adjustment to what remained of their ways of life would be the one that, somehow, they would be able to learn to live with? What if some learned to hate who they were, or to deny it out of fear, while others embraced the State's image of them, emulating as far as possible the State's principles and accepting its judgment about their own families, friends, and neighbors? And what if others could find no option other than to accept the slow, lingering death the State had mapped out for them, or even to speed themselves along to their State-desired end?

What if?

Then, you would have Canada's treatment of the North American Aboriginal population in general, and the Indian Residential School Experience in particular.

And here and now we are going to prove it to you.

**Narration:** In 1492, Christopher Columbus reached the Americas. He was not the first visitor to cross the ocean from faraway lands, such as the Norse or Chinese, but he did represent a new way of life that violently spread across the so-called New World. Contrary to popular belief, the roots of European colonialism do not begin here, but rather in Europe itself. Michael Parenti is an outspoken scholar, activist and author.

**Michael Parenti:** The earliest regions in which the Western powers imposed economic underdevelopment were on Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe was European, Caucasian. That was in the 16th century. Britain's oldest colony was a white colony. Its oldest most oppressed colony at least for any number of centuries; going back 700 years or more was populated entirely by white Europeans. I'm talking about Ireland. If the Imperialists exploited darker peoples, it was for economic gain. They didn't care what race you were. If you've got a good farm, you got something going there that I want. I don't care if you're white, black, yellow, red, whatever.

**Narration:** The expansionist nature of European societies required the subjugation of peoples to feed the growing needs of burgeoning capitalism. As such, anybody who got in the way of the seizure of lands or other material wealth became the subjects of colonialism. Dr. Roland Chrisjohn...

**Roland Chrisjohn:** Residential schools for the Irish for the Welsh, for the Scottish during the development of what we now call Great Britain was exactly what they were doing to First Nations people, and that is stripping them of their language, stripping them of their tribal backgrounds and their cultures and substituting a series of invented traditions, so the picture today for example of the Scotsman with the tartan and kilt and the tam Shan is manufactured! Scottish people, Irish people and Welsh people were tribal societies and living as tribal societies, they rejected and resisted being forced into an industrialized, depersonalized system where they were supposed to treat themselves as more or less fodder for someone else's industrial machine. They fought about it and they lost. It's not a nice history, but there is a history there. Without that history, it seems, as Indian residential schools are something that fell fully formed out of the sky as something that the Canadians were trying to do to indigenous peoples. No! It happened to indigenous peoples all over the world. There are residential schools today!

**Narration:** Ward Churchill is a member of the Keetowah Cherokee nation and Professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Boulder, Colorado. He has been involved with the American Indian Movement since 1972 and has authored numerous books on the topic of Indigenous people, colonialism and genocide.

**Ward Churchill:** Colonialism, in its legal definition, simply means the assertion of primacy by one nation over another, as indicated by a desire to benefit from the land and/or resources and/or labor, it can be any or all of the above, of the subject people by the colonizing people.

The classic colonial formation, of the countries of Europe exporting themselves literally in terms of their population, in terms of their technology, in terms of their ideology, in terms of what Adolf Hitler would eventually call their 'belton-slaung', and imposing themselves upon the rest of the planet.

There was a period of time in the 19th century, when at least four fifths of the planetary surface was claimed by one or another European power, parasitically draining them of their assets, of their vitality, in order to enrich and empower itself, to assert itself ultimately the cutting edge of advancement of the entire human project since day one and to entitle itself to a status of privilege and pre-preponderance in terms of politics, which remains essentially unabated to the present moment.

So you have the British empire, upon which the sun never set, of which Canada and previously the area now known as the United States was once a part, extended itself into the Caribbean, into small sectors of what's known as Ibero-America, out across the Pacific, expounded itself in India, wielded a certain hegemonic influence in its self-proclaimed sphere in China, which dominated sectors of Africa for a better of a century and so on and so on.

**Narration:** Colonialism is not just the theft of territory, and populating it with new settlers and their way of life. It also involves the destruction of the social, political, and economic institutions of the original inhabitants.

Many Indigenous nations were instrumental Allies to the crown during the colonial wars between the English and French. As a result, it became difficult for Canada to claim indigenous territory through right of conquest. When Canada became a country in 1867, the problem of how to steal Indigenous land took a new direction.

The solution to the Indian Problem became a reduction of those who were 'officially' considered 'Indian'. The Indian Act came into existence in 1876, nine years after Canada morphed from a British colony into a country, superseding over 600 sovereign indigenous nations. The Indian Act of 1876 introduced initiatives, which were entirely consistent with the need to bureaucratically eliminate Indians. In essence, the motto; "The only good Indian is a Dead Indian" became: "The Only Good Indian is a Non-Indian."

The Indian Act involved the imposition of the band council system of government over pre-existing traditional forms of social and political organization. In some communities, Canadian band council democracy was literally introduced by force of arms.

**Patricia Monture-Angus:** I don't have a perspective on being aboriginal. I am, period. I am a Mohawk woman. It's not a perspective. It's a way of being.

**Narration:** Patricia Monture-Angus is Professor of Law at the University of Saskatchewan.

**Patricia Monture-Angus:** Don't tell me a Band Council is traditional Government, don't tell me it's Indian Government. Those are the government structures they forced on our people. They come out of the Indian Act. As far as I'm concerned I'm going to reject anything that comes out of the Indian act because of the pain it has caused our communities.

**Narration:** It isn't surprising that most Canadians do not understand the legacy of colonialism, and its existence on these lands since this history is not properly taught in schools.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** Also we talk about history, at least from our perspectives as First Nations people that it distorts, it omits, it lies about our history.

**Narration:** Andrea Bear Nicholas is Maliseet from Tobique and Atlantic Chair in Native Studies at St. Thomas University in Fredericton. She describes some common misconceptions about treaties.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** For those of you who live in the Maritimes, you probably know what a big issue treaties have become, but I like to use this example because it shows that most Maritimers did not even hear of treaties until the last decade or decade and a half ago. Why? Because someone or some group of someone's chose not to include it in what children learn; what people learn in school. And I'm pretty convinced that that's been fairly deliberate. There has been an attempt to get rid of Aboriginal people since day one, to get rid of the truth about our past with the settler, the immigrant society, the details of that past, to forget that our relationship is not a relationship of simply an ethnic group, but that we actually are nations, we have a nationhood relationship with the Canadian state, the Canadian nation. And I would insist that this be the understanding of the reason why this has been left out of the textbooks. These treaties are not just Aboriginal treaties. These are treaties between Aboriginal people and the Canadian state, the Canadian people.

In the Maritimes, the only existing treaties were Peace and Friendship Treaties. They were nation-to-nation agreements, which promised to end the hostilities between the encroaching settlers and Aboriginal peoples. The Peace and Friendship Treaties, unlike most of the treaties across the country, are treaties between First Nations and the British. They were treaties signed at the end of six wars that spanned a period of about 100 years. Not one deals with the land question, not one is a land surrender of any kind.

**Roland Chrisjohn:** Nova Scotia is not surrendered territory. Canada has no right to write Canada across Nova Scotia, to collect taxes from the people who inhabit the land, cut down trees, to allocate natural resources, to pollute water in Nova Scotia. At least 90% of Quebec is not surrendered territory. About 75% of Ontario is not surrendered territory. The status of the Prairie treaties, which do appear to be surrenders, are questionable on two bases: One, The Indians have no memory of land surrender being raised... And there is actually documented evidence of the people who were signing the treaties as saying: "Ha! Ha! We put one over on the Indians. We didn't tell them what they were actually signing. We mistranslated it!" Or John MacLean is a really great one for that, he says; "the people we wanted to sign the surrender wouldn't, so we found some other people, liquored them up and declared them the Chief and tribal council and got them to sign it!" In a fair court, how much would hold up? So the status of the REAL surrendered land is still questionable. 75% of British Columbia is not seeded territory; only the far Northeastern arm it's covered by Treaty 8 in Alberta may be surrendered territory. The Yukon Territory is not ceded territory. Where did Canada get the right to write 'Canada' across that? When you add it all up, for about 90% of Canada, even under the best possible scenario, there is no legal transfer of title from the Aboriginal inhabitants to the Crown.

What that means is that the absence of such, according to European laws, it doesn't matter if the Indians had a law about this, but according to European laws the legal inheritors of property- you get your legal inheritance! You don't have to have a will. I get my share simply by the fact that, under European law, I am legal progeny of that person. The Aboriginal people in Canada today are the legal successors under European law of the unseeded territory. So- not only is all this land NOT Canada. But they owe for everything they've taken out. The trees have to come back, the lobsters have to come back, the gold, the nickel up in Voise's bay, the trees up in Lubicon territory, the oil under the Stonechild reserve up in Edmonton. How many supposed transfers of possession were illegal?

When I talk to non-indigenous people they often say, well... That was a long time ago and I didn't have anything to do with that. Well, sorry- the receiver of a stolen good is also a criminal. The fact that you've got a deed from your Grandfather who stole it from the Indians doesn't make it any more legal; it's still a theft. You're still the receiver of stolen goods. None of this is

expiated. It's expiated less than one circumstance; if the Indians are eliminated. If the land becomes literally uninhabited then it's free. Free and clear. So, one of the problems of European political economics in terms of its expansion in the world has always been, terminating indigenous peoples.

**Narration:** A commonly held belief of European superiority holds that one 'advanced' society will inevitably replace another inferior or 'primitive' society. Michael Parenti challenges this notion:

**Michael Parenti:** If you look closely at the indigenous peoples of North Central and South America for instance. Compare them to what life was like in Europe in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, they had agricultural skills that were as good as anything in Europe. They had horticultural skills, they had crafts, they had medicine and herbs and tribal democratic practices that were not in abundant supply in Europe. But these Indigenous, these Native people, these First Nation people, Native Americans, Indians, whatever the names we give them, they did lag behind Europe in a number of things: Hangings and murders, Europe had a much higher rate. Syphilis, gonorrhea, small pox, typhoid, bubonic plague, much higher in Europe, a fact unknown in North America. Slavery and prostitution. There was some African slavery, there were instances of African slavery to be sure but it was nothing like what you had in the Roman Empire or during serfdom and the like. Religious wars, witch hunts and inquisitions, Europe had them beat in all of these things.

**Narration:** The myth of European superiority masks the violence behind the implementation of colonialism, as if it was the necessary outcome of an evolutionary process. Of course, colonization in Canada was not as pretty as some want us to believe. Andrea Bear Nicholas...

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** The province of New Brunswick came out with a textbook last year. Their whole thing was that relations had always been 'pretty good' between Indigenous peoples and the invading peoples. When one looks at the details, the particular stories of those contacts, although these stories and accounts are sparse, we don't have a lot for this area of the world. Almost every last one of them has violence, has invasion, has arrogance, has ignorance, immediate oppression of the peoples who are being met. Immediate conflict, so it's very difficult in my head for anybody to characterize that whole first contact or couple of centuries of first contacts as anything but violent and anything but oppressive. It was entirely an attempt to get at our land, our resources and if it meant being friendly to us for a while, it usually didn't last.

**Narration:** Andrea Bear Nicholas describes one method of eradication that was used in the first wave of colonization. Bounties were paid by the crown for confirmed death of Indians, including women and children.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** One of the most obvious and perfect examples of the violence, the genocide that was practiced against us: the bounties were bounties on our scalps or our bodies, if a scalp could be produced in lieu of a whole body that was okay too. They were issued quite often against particular First Nation groups at the time. For instance, the people on the Penobscot River and not the rest. Unfortunately, if you've selected out one indigenous group that has the physical characteristics of them all, then it becomes something against the whole people, not just the particular nation. Any bounty hunter could produce any scalp and get money for it and there would be no way to prove that it was the particular group of people that was named in the original bounty. The other thing is that most of our textbooks have never included anything about bounties and of course when we first tried to get this into textbooks, we met with incredible opposition. Finally, people were saying, "The only way we'll include it is if you can footnote it," thinking that we could never footnote it. But of course, the colonizers kept very good records of what they thought was just behaviour and those records are there, just that they've been left out of the history rather conveniently.

**Narration:** Andrea Bear Nicholas has coined the term 'historicide' when talking about colonialism in Canada.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** I very much fell in love with Frantz Fanon's statement "One of the first things a colonizer does when faced with a people that they wish to colonize is to turn to the past of that colonized people and pervert, distort and destroy it." That's the essence of it. That it's very important to make the colonized people into the image of the colonizer to make them forget their past, which is their oral tradition, their history, their whole way of being in the world. If you're going to manipulate them or use them to your own purposes to exploit their land or their labour, one must have that whole history erased, so historicide – the killing of history – becomes an essential part of the colonizers duty to his own goals in colonial efforts.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** And one example, just one example is the story of an attack on one of our villages, Kingsclear which is right near Fredericton, an attack on one of those villages in the middle of the night by virtually an army of woodsmen, primarily from the perspective of the woman who told this story- primarily an attack on the women. And I couldn't find anything anywhere other than this story from this woman in the Maliseet language to verify in any other way that it happened until recently with the help of some archivists, found the record that this actually did happen at 3 o'clock in the morning on June 17 in 1861. A piece of history that is pretty important in a people's history, but a piece of history, that were it not for the language and this storyteller in her language, we would not know this. So, I guess I'm just saying that that's the tip of the iceberg that I'm talking out. Just imagine how many other stories will never be gathered because the speakers are dying with their languages.

**Conclusion:**

You've been listening to Colonization and the Killing of History, Part One of Hoping Against Hope? The Struggle Against Colonialism in Canada, a three-part series produced by Praxis Media Productions and the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group. A special thanks to the Department of Native Studies at St. Thomas University in Fredericton

For more information, please check out our websites at [praxismedia.ca](http://praxismedia.ca) and [nspirg.org](http://nspirg.org)

## Part Two - Racism, Assimilation & Genocide

Welcome to Hoping Against Hope? The Struggle Against Colonialism in Canada, a three-part series produced by Praxis Media Productions and the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group.

This is the second installment, Racism, Assimilation & Genocide

Narrated by Ardath Whynaught

**Michael Parenti:** The new settlers abused the Natives hospitality, they defaced their graves, they massacred their tribes and they exalted that: (here's a quote) "that God was pleased to smite his heathen enemies and give us their lands for inheritance". It's really remarkable how pleasing God always seems to engage murder and real estate acquisition. All through history you see that we're just doing god's work here you know. And sure enough as the victims of imperialism were exterminated, so were they demonized and dehumanized.

**Roland Chrisjohn:** Black slavery began much the same time as the dispossession of North America did by Columbus. Columbus was also part of the slave trade. He wasn't involved in stealing Africa right off the bat, but he was involved in stealing the lives of Africans. And when he got over here, because the Indians weren't putting up with his shenanigans, were committing mass suicide, he needed people to replace them.

**Michael Parenti:** When you go to a country and you colonize it, or you attack it, or you plunder it, you also introduce something else. With slavery and imperialism there comes racism and racism is one of the poisonous things of slavery and imperialism. Racism helps justify slavery, class oppression and colonialism. I mean, why did the European colonizers forcibly bring African people to the Western hemisphere right into the Caribbean, into the West Indies and into North America itself? Did they bring them in to just add some warmth and colour to their Calvinist lives? Black people were brought to this country... Africans were brought to this country for one reason, and one reason alone: to gain access to a profitable work force and to live splendidly off the super-exploitation of African labour. The white colonizers abducted black people to toil on land that they stole from red and brown people.

**Michael Parenti:** But in short order, in time, they had to rationalize their atrocities in racist terms. You see when they come in and they steal your land, they burn your crops, they slaughter your herds, they devastate your villages, they destroy your townships, they incinerate your field, they enslave your inhabitants to go work in the mines, they rape your women, they spit your children on bayonets. The colonizers, after awhile, they have to deny, not their own humanity- which they should- but they deny the humanity of their victims. They see them as moral inferiors, not fully human. And that is the essence of racism: to demonize your victim

**Roland Chrisjohn:** Racism is an ideology of dehumanization. And there are others! There are other ideologies of dehumanization, sexism, ageism, are also ideologies of dehumanization, but racism is another ideology of dehumanization deployed to conceal and/or deny the material content of dispossession, discrimination and prejudice.

**Narration:** Dr. Chrisjohn expands on the birth of racism in the Americas:

**Roland Chrisjohn:** If they are subhuman, non-human, then essentially what you can say is "well, occasionally I can pay attention to the noises that are emanating from those creatures." Any good farmer knows when a cow is upset or will pay attention to a barking dog under certain circumstances, but what you choose to do about it and when you choose to pay attention to it, is your presumption as a human being, not something that you have to accord to somebody by virtue of them being another human being with rights, that you have a social relationship with, that there are mutual responsibilities to. I don't talk about racism and I don't want to talk about it or understand racism as an emotional, 'felt' thing, I want to emphasize that it has a material basis, that if you're going to steal people and not allow them to do anything about it and not allow them to complain about it, it's a real good thing if you can pretend that those are not people. By the same token, if you are going run off into Africa and take people out by chains and ship them in millions to be worked to death in mines and farms on an entirely different continent, it's a pretty good thing if you can pretend that they're not human beings. Those are the origins of racism.

**Narration:** Racist ideology has been insidiously forced upon people and has even made its way into how Indians understand themselves...

**Ward Churchill:** ...So that takes us to this mystical notion of blood, which is converted into an actual genetic understanding or misunderstanding of reality of which ultimately means that you can treat people the way you treat dogs; you got purebred, you've got various add mixtures that go into lines of dog and you actually assign values, characteristics, traits based on genetic pedigree and so forth. That's ultimately the situation we occupy now. Native people in particular in the United States although other groups have been afflicted with this pseudo-scientific posturing.

There's a whole sort of revitalized eugenics movement going on now. The majority of non-white groups and conversely the white groups themselves have been subjected to a genetic understanding of their identity in the United States in a legal form for quite a long time. How many parts Indian are you? Well, you count ancestors and their quantum degree and you make an additive or subtractive induction of your own identity. I'm a 1/4 blood Indian, I'm a 1/2 blood Indian, I'm 3/16 blood Indian, I'm 19/264 parts Indian.

**Roland Chrisjohn:** We are falling into the abyss if we believe that race determines who it is that we are. That somehow, our cultural practices are encoded in our genetic material and it involves a complacency of some sort. We can put aside our practices. We can put aside our languages. We can put aside how it is that we are supposed to relate to one another, to the Universe and to nature. We can put aside all of that because it's just in our genes. Let's not worry about learning our languages; let's not worry about maintaining our religious and cultural institutions; let's not worry about maintaining the long house and the song and the old ways. None of that's necessary because genetically it'll be in our skin colour and the shape of our teeth. And I say that is nonsense. It comes down to practice and that's what's being denied us: the right to practice in this world what it is that defines us the way that we are. The reason why--I'll be very clear on that: it's political and it's economic. It's got everything to do with the assimilationist agenda of demonstrating to the rest of the world, "Well we did our best by the Indians but they're not here anymore."

**Roland Chrisjohn:** By accepting this genetic determinism for race, look at what we do to ourselves. There are all kinds of First Nations people or Indigenous people that we deny a relationship to on the basis that well, they haven't met some other kind of race-based litmus test for inclusion as one of us. "Oh, the Métis? Well, you know the Métis they're not really Indians." They're just treated like them, and they don't have any treaty rights and so the fact that they share to a great extent our oppression, they went to residential schools like we did, that when we study for example the history of Manitoba we can see that here's another group of people that were really royally ripped off by the Canadian government. We'll put all by the wayside and say well, you're not Indian enough for us. Or we do it to ourselves. "Oh, Chrisjohn, you know you're kind of light." Yeah, do you know what? I'm 5/8th Indian. If we're going to do this calculation, then I'm 2/8 Scottish and I am 1/8th Jewish- Ooh! Oy vey! I'd like to believe, however that I picked a little bit up from knowledge of what people have done to the Jews over the centuries, to what happened to the Scots during the Highland clearances and to what happened to different First Nations association groups that are in my background. My historical background, not my genetic background, my historical background.

**Narration:** Although the classic colonial model has been used in the Americas to destroy Indigenous nations, today the struggle is much more subtle. An integral part of the process of domination is the internalization of oppression within the victims themselves, so that the system is then perpetuated through generations. Although at first glance some may think that Colonialism is behind us, the neocolonial era has actually replaced the so-called "white" managers of the colonial project with "red faces."

Andrea Bear Nicholas explains the challenges with this latest form of colonial domination as assimilation.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** Neocolonialism for us today is not a word that our people are very familiar with. I mean, we tend to say we understand colonialism, but very few of us realize when neocolonialism is at work. Many of us do recognize band councils as being neocolonial. But many of us have, by the same token, while they recognize it, will say, "Well, that's the only way we can affect change. We need to get involved, we need to do that." And they don't realize that it is still assimilation. That, if you've reached a point in your world where you see literally assimilation as your only choice, you've been had. You're there. It really is a struggle to understand how that works on each and every one of us.

There are aspects of colonialism that people will talk about as very overt, open kinds of colonial behaviour on the part of say, provincial governors or people in control, but they don't realize that when our own people have accepted jobs, have become part of their system, there's this sense that somehow we're doing the best in an impossible situation as prisoners in a jail might react. We need to get the best for each other by cooperating, by working with them, by doing their bidding and perhaps, if a few of us can "get ahead" then maybe that will spread to the rest of us and we'll be better off; we'll be fed, we'll have houses, we'll be taking care of our basic needs. But in fact, one of our biggest struggles today is the issue of our own people accepting jobs and basically working with the opposition.

**Narration:** While attempting to co-opt aboriginal sovereign nations, the Canadian Government has recently been using the rhetoric of self-government.

**Patricia Monture-Angus:** When I say that I don't believe in self-government it's because of the power of the state... Because of the power of the Federal Government. That word has now taken on at least a political meaning whereby it means that the Federal Government believes that they can delegate certain 'municipal type' powers to First Nations. I don't believe that's what self-government means. I don't believe that Canada has anything to say to us about what our powers are as First Peoples. I believe that those are Creator given and can't be interfered with. We as peoples can enter into a discussion about how we're going to have a relationship with Canada. Canada, I don't believe has the political will to do it. I believe that Canada has to get over the idea that their forms and ways of government, their constitution, are superior to First Nation's ways.

**Narration:** The Canadian state's concept of self-government is a subtle tool of assimilation.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** It's been the specific goal of colonial policy in Canada. Ever since the bounties either failed or became not exactly good practice, so assimilation became the second wave of assault on our people.

**Roland Chrisjohn:** This assimilationist attack is a very subtle one and it emphasizes individual achievement and individual well-being and self-aggrandizement. So a lot of the people that can convince themselves that they are doing good for First Nations people through therapy are also doing very well financially. Yeah, we're a cash cow and we're a cash cow for the government systems and it's part of the assimilationist attack for us to start thinking about our own personal self-satisfied well-being as the be all and the end all... Rather than, what is the stability of my nation? What is the longevity of my nation? What is the well-being of my peoples... When we take that as uppermost in our mind, and well, the fact that we're doing a little bit better or worse than somebody else is neither here nor there... But we have the situation where we're behaving like white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. This becomes a test for how advanced and civilized we are becoming. The more we behave the way our oppressors behave, then the more civilized we are becoming. We are proving our abilities to govern ourselves! We prove our ability to govern ourselves by having Parliaments and band councils and votes and secret ballots and corruption. When we behave like the Chrétien government; we're there!

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** Assimilation, it certainly implies the efforts to make a people like another people and I think the most important thing that needs to be understood about this is that actually fits the Genocide Convention...The idea that a colonized people must have their identity, their being literally wiped away from them and that they must be remolded, refashioned in the image of the colonizers, primarily for purposes of control and exploitation.

**Narration:** There are plenty of examples of genocide against Aboriginal people by the Canadian state; from bounties for scalps to the forced sterilization of Native women. Residential schooling is a poignant example of assimilation as a form of genocide.

When the United Nations Genocide Convention was penned in 1948, defining the crime of genocide in International law, residential schools were in full operation. Section two of the Convention states that "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" is an act of genocide.

Residential Schools operated in Canada from approximately 1870 to the 1990's. The children of First Nations groups were removed, by force of law, from their homes, families and communities, and forced to attend schools operated by non-Indians, sometimes for up to 13 years. For the most part, the government contracted the running of the schools to the churches. Although not all Indian children went to these schools, residential schooling was a part of the "Indian experience" affecting everyone in the communities.

Jeanette Armstrong is a member of the traditional council of the Penticton Indian Band in British Columbia, and is director of the En'owkin Centre, a school teaching traditional Okanagan philosophy and practice. She describes the removal of the children from her community

**Jeanette Armstrong:** The village chief in collaboration with the village priest was picking up our children and sending them to Kamloops Indian residential school 80 miles to the north of us. Cranbrook Indian residential school was maybe 200 miles over the mountain. Some of the children went there and some went up to Kamloops.

During those years, and I was too young to remember, there was a real strong thrust to take the children, to go into the communities, especially with the traditional families, for conversion purposes; to go in there to force the huitna parents to force the children to be relocated into these residential schools.

**Narration:** Various forms of abuse were widespread at the hands of the school authorities. Rape, violent beatings and countless other forms of torture were common. Some children were forced to wear knitting needles pierced through their tongues as punishment for speaking their Native languages. In truth, these schools functioned not to educate Native children, rather the goal was assimilation. In the words of Duncan Campbell Scott, Canadian Indian policy was to "take the Indian out of the Indian."

**Jeanette Armstrong:** The taking of our children- our people- and putting them into that system wasn't meant to make better people of us; to better our lives, to increase benefits to our communities or to take care of the security of our children. In fact,

what it did was to create generation upon generation of people who have no understanding of what family life should be... What family security could be, no understanding of how to interact with each other, how to interact with others in a community sense, no understanding of basic economics all of those things were wiped right out of their lives.

What instead they got in those residential schools, some of it is coming out now, I know that some of the people who are older cousins to people who went there, they come back and they are filled with anger and pain. And I know from doing the statistics in my own community that people died when they came back. People didn't live. And people who stayed and had their children taken away died. They didn't live either. Something was damaged inside our community in a way that isn't understood right now.

**Narration:** The genocidal nature of these schools is generally unrecognized by the Canadian public, largely because the accusation is rarely heard. Perhaps genocide in Canada is rarely acknowledged, because Canadians and the Canadian state benefit from it.

The Canadian government and the churches have been evading responsibility for their crimes, focusing instead on healing Native people rather than providing justice. Somehow, it is the victims of genocide who are the sick ones, not the perpetrators. When genocide is brought up, it's denied.

**Roland Chrisjohn:** I bring it up because I am hoping, hoping against hope: that the average Canadian will read what their Government did in their name, to human beings to say that what their churches did to human beings in their name because their churches are not telling them. Their government is not telling them. They will not allow the word genocide to come up in discussion. Read through- and I did read through the whole damn transcript of the Royal Commission Report. The word genocide comes up four times. And when the word 'genocide' comes up it's not responded to. It's treated as if it were a rhetorical flourish on the part of the speaker and it's just brushed right over. Please, please just admit you did this, just admit it.

The crime of genocide is being covered up. Now it's a double crime. People who didn't commit the first crime are committing the second. The newspapers are saying that 50 people a month are dying that have a claim in Residential Schools. Maybe the Canadian government is hoping that we'll temporize and temporize and temporize and if we do that long enough they'll all be dead. And the word will never come up. And we can give them these dismissible \$3000 settlements and that will be that.

**Conclusion:**

You've been listening to

Racism, Assimilation & Genocide, Part Two of Hoping Against Hope? The Struggle Against Colonialism in Canada, a three-part series produced by Praxis Media Productions and the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group. A special thanks to the Department of Native Studies at St. Thomas University in Fredericton

For more details on how to order this documentary on CD, the complete transcript and additional information, please check out our websites at [praxismedia.ca](http://praxismedia.ca) and [nspirg.org](http://nspirg.org)

Thanks for listening.

**Part Three - Education, Language & Resistance**

Welcome to Hoping Against Hope? The Struggle Against Colonialism in Canada, a three-part series produced by Praxis Media Productions and the Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group.

This is the third and last installment: Education, Language & Resistance

Narrated by Ardath Whyngaught

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** The destruction of our languages, the denigration of our cultural ways, our practices, our hunting, fishing, the fact that we didn't settle down in one place meant that our land was free for the taking, so if they could get us to settle down, then they could still take our land, most of the rest of it from wherever we were settled. It was all part of the strategy of helping themselves, enriching the countries and the peoples of Europe when they first arrived here. It has been a practice in various manifestations by both English and French, but generally they both tried the education route as the main vehicle for assimilating indigenous peoples.

**Narration:** Schools have colluded in the attack on Aboriginal forms of life. Schools maintain the hegemony of the western worldview – promoting individualism instead of communities, and economic and material acquisition over equitable distribution and cooperation...

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** The fact that the idea of sending children to public schools is also benign and harmless is another one of the kinds of indoctrination that we need to address. The public schools are being run according to an ideology based in capitalism. An ideology that is actually alien to our own way of life, our own forms of life- it's very blatant that education is being used in this direction. So that, when we say that sending our children to school is harmless and benign, we as aboriginal people don't even realize how seriously not benign that school program is. The subtle things (of teaching such things as entrepreneurialism) are actually antithetical and destructive of our way of life and there is a sense that all people, in order to survive in the modern world need to not only know that entrepreneurialism is good and is useful and is fine, but that our people need to understand how much of an assault on our form of life, if our children are being taught to think of number one, themselves only... Where's our community?

**Narration:** Although people often associate the loss of indigenous language with residential schools, enrollment in the modern public school system has led to a profound decline in fluency of native languages. According to Statistics Canada, out of nearly 60 Native languages in Canada, only 3 or 4 are expected to survive the next few decades. There is a word for this, coined by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas...

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** Linguicide was coined by a researcher from Denmark, although Finnish, I believe, originally, an incredible astute scholar around issues of language destruction. Her word coined; the killing of languages, linguicide, linguisticism. It also carries with it the idea that the languages that we speak, indigenous peoples around the world, are not just dying out by some sort of natural force that happens to every minority language, but that there's an actual deliberateness, there's actually agency involved.

And certainly in our own context, linguicide has been operating in a very noticeable way,

**Tove Skutnabb-Kangas:** Languages are today being killed, being murdered. Languages have always disappeared, some languages, but languages today are being killed faster than ever before in human history. Most of the languages to disappear would be or are indigenous languages and according to even the most optimistic scenarios, most of the world's indigenous languages would disappear within the next 100 years. Languages have been called the vast libraries of human intangible heritage. Somebody said that when an elder dies, it's like a PhD disappears. So, human intangible heritage, libraries disappear. When they disappear, is it a natural death where languages just disappear naturally? These libraries are set on fire, and educational systems and mass media participate in committing linguistic or cultural genocide. Educational systems and mass media are the most important direct agents in this genocide and behind them are the world's economic, techno-military and political systems. This killing is a crime against humanity and continues while we are sitting here.

**Narration:** Challenging linguicide means convincing people that it is not a 'natural' phenomenon and that native languages have a viable existence.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** A colleague of mine, who is one of my people, has actually said that our language is experiencing suicide – a long slow suicide. In other words, that we're doing it to ourselves. And this is the blaming-the-victim mentality – there's probably every good reason to think that somehow we're doing it to ourselves, we've decided we want to educate our children in English. We've decided our language should be relegated to 20 minutes a day as opposed to the whole day, and there is a certain amount of our own people in decision making roles making that decision. But I think people need to understand that those decisions, the basis for those decisions, were laid long ago and those individuals were educated to think that our language wasn't important. So a great part of the resistance requires that we be out there explaining that this isn't something that's coming from within – it isn't a language that's naturally dying, it's not – even where our own people are in positions that are sort of moving it in that direction – we need to understand the large picture here and that's quite often completely lost and becomes the challenge for those of us who realize if we want to change something we've really got to change some of the people's understandings of how that has – neocolonialism has worked on us.

**Narration:** Native language rights activists have been organizing under the banner of "education in our language, not language in our education." Although small in number, there have been successful grassroots language programs taking root in Aboriginal communities.

**Andrea Bear Nicholas:** The writing is more than on the wall unless we take charge, unless we can get some support somewhere for these languages and for schools in our language. There are groups, indigenous groups around the world that have taken it in hand, and of course, it goes back to the issue of education in those languages. Just the immersion programs themselves have those stories repeated hundreds of times. Communities that resist – somebody goes ahead with an immersion program, all of a sudden, 2 or 3 years down the road there's a handful of children, 10, 20 children who are actually able to speak the language and the elders haven't heard a child speak the language in 40, 50, 60 years. Suddenly, lights go off, and people say "hey." So we need to have the persistence, the resistance to be able to stay with it, to believe that even if we don't win in the end, at least, maybe, we can spark something in others who can pick up the ball and continue the struggle whether it be down the road or with you.

I think resistance means I guess being stubborn and recognizing that most everybody out there is saying that it won't work, or it won't get you anywhere, or it won't pay, it's useless, there's a bigger tide coming at us, might as well go with it. I think resistance means thumbing your nose at that tide and saying I don't care, we need to act as though something is possible here, otherwise it will never be possible. We need to start working in that direction, we need to start assuming that other people will eventually see what we are doing and will recognize that this is where to go.

I think that resistance isn't something we wait for; it's something we need to individually understand as our own role in the struggle. I guess understanding that we've got a struggle is number one. To understand there is more than somewhat of a war out there – the assault on our language and our whole way of being in this world are ongoing. And that every time one of us is persuaded to work with them, to somehow effect the end of some aspect of who we are or how we live, then we have an obvious struggle whether we recognize it, but the irony there is that we're less likely to take on our own people when they're acting the role of the colonizer. So this resistance becomes a steeper uphill battle. Had we only the colonial classes standing against us, the real difficulty is what education has done to our heads and to our own people, and created such desperation that being like the colonizer becomes the only solution.

And I know I'm sort of echoing Frantz Fanon here and certainly it was his writing that certainly alerted me to that people don't change willingly until they're desperate, until they see no other options, and I scream and cry every time I see that happening to our people. I don't blame them for going with the flow of the neocolonial pressures. I think it's also part of the resistance – is try to articulate where that desperation is coming from and that it's really not from us, it's not because we're inadequate or we're somehow sick or somehow in need of healing and that therefore we're desperate. No, that's all been externally created – and I think a very big part of that resistance requires that we be able to articulate that to our own people and to be able to make them understand.

**Narration:** Colonialism isn't just an "Aboriginal" issue. It's an issue that concerns every Canadian. This process, which we're all a part of not only denies the humanity of the colonized, but that of the colonizer. It is the responsibility of every global citizen to resist one's government when it engages in genocide. To do otherwise is to be complicit. Ward Churchill provides a straightforward solution:

**Ward Churchill:** What would I proscribe as an antidote to the situation? Law enforcement, more than that, obedience to law. I don't think we need amendments, I think we need some adherence to the existent laws. My ancestors and your ancestors in a figurative sense, agreed to a set of legal principles that defined the relations, and those are as operate now as they were then. So by law enforcement, I say to the citizenry of Canada, that is the non-indigenous citizenry because the citizenry of indigenous nations are citizens of other nations, that's what treaties mean, not that you'd know that in Canada. The citizens of Canada itself on the other hand need to do whatever is necessary to get their government on a leash so that it's compelled to obey the law. That would be my prescription. I could peddle that at a Republican convention, law enforcement- big laws.

**Narration:** When it comes to Aboriginal nations, Canadians are doing an abysmal job at ensuring that their government obeys existing Canadian and international laws. The burden to act is predominantly left to the colonized themselves. Recently, in B.C.'s interior there has been a hot bed of highly publicized indigenous resistance. Delta hotels and other corporations are trying to build a major ski resort on unceded Secwepemc land. Since 1999, 54 people have been arrested for peacefully defending their land.

Arnie Jack was one of those arrested. He talks about the difficulty of remaining patient when faced with the desperation of their situation.

**Arnie Jack:** Sometimes some of us have to leave in defense of our lands and we understand that. Sometimes some of us don't make it through that storm. And if we have to take it to that level again, how do we deal with this? Have we exhausted all peaceful means? Do we fire a shot that is heard around the world?

For me, that was a really hard position not to take. Sometimes I felt like a chicken shit being taken off that mountain in handcuffs and leg chains because I knew that I could have taken it to another level. And yet I have had people sit down and talk to me and say 'we're still going after that peaceful resolution to continue to move forward'. And I even heard it today. It's so easy to fire a shot; the hardest thing is not pulling that trigger.

**Narration:** Jeanette Armstrong recounts her family's resistance to the residential schools

**Jeanette Armstrong:** My sisters and my brothers tell me of the resistance our parents and our grandmother and our uncles went through. There were four traditional families that resisted that, in the south part of the Okanagan, there was more in the north part. They actually resisted that with armed resistance and I read accounts of it during that period. There was a huge big brawl down at the village between some of our traditional people and some of our not so traditional people and the RCMP and provincial police. The outcome of it was that most of our people took off into the hills. I know that in our family, the principals in our family stood at the gate and were armed and said 'you may as well shoot us if you're going to take our children. You take our

lives when you take our children and you're not going to do that, we're not going to allow you to do that. And I give thanks every day I wake up for that kind of resistance.

**Narration:** Since the outset of European colonialism, peoples have been resisting the destruction of their forms of life. While it may not be possible to end the legacy of colonialism in our lifetime, it is our responsibility to ensure that there is a world left for the future.

**Ward Churchill:** We can begin to work out common ground, basis for alliance, the ability to project the strength of our own as a counter balance to this process of predation rolling back and preventing the continuation of the processes that've been grinding up our peoples and our cultures and our resources, and our lands for a long time, you create a barrier to prevent the same grinding process from afflicting you and yours in the not so distant future and carrying on it's logical conclusion of nullification. You have a right to do that.

You have the right to save yourself from an impending doom. You have not only the right, but perhaps the obligation as human beings in this world to act with other human beings, your relatives in this world to preclude this future from occurring for you and us alike.

You have a right and the obligation to bestow something further in that direction to your children and that which you inherited from your parents. You have the same right and the same obligation to make that provision for your children's children and your children's children and your children's children's children seven generations on into the future and in seven generations down the line, were this kind of vision pursued and acted upon in a real way, not just by Native people who are the front end victims of the process in the first instance but by those who are increasingly victimized and potentially to be victimized, we can take things and put it in an opposite stance.

Slap them around a little bit, and no, I'm not saying vote the rascals out. If voting could change anything it would be illegal. Petition campaigns won't do it, prayer vigils won't work; you can't hold up a candle and have everything get right with God. It ain't gonna happen. You're going to have to do something concrete so I'll leave it to you to figure out what it is you might do.

Is it something that we can at this point late in our history begin to achieve? I think it is, but we'll never know if we don't link hands and try. We have the obligation, we have the right and ultimately, I believe, we have the strength. And, so without further ado, let me just say, 'let's get on with it!' Thank you very much for listening.

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